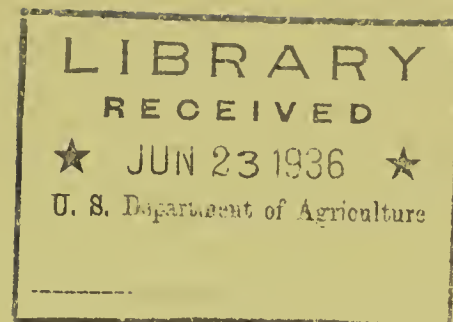


Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1.42
m75 R

Release Friday afternoon
newspapers, June 19, 1936



THE 1936 AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM
IN THE NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Paper by G. B. Thorne, Director, North Central Division,
Agricultural Adjustment Administration, for delivery be-
fore the American Institute of Cooperation at Urbana,
Illinois, Friday morning, June 19, 1936.

The Agricultural Conservation Program now under way in the Corn Belt is
a part of the nationwide cooperative effort to encourage a wiser use of our
national soil resources.

Mr. Tolley, whom you have just heard, gave a brief picture of the pro-
gram in its entirety. He also touched upon a number of administrative problems,
particularly with reference to the long-time policy.

In discussing agricultural conservation as it relates to the North
Central States, there is one point I wish to emphasize. That is the national
recognition which the program has given to two interrelated factors. The first
is the fundamental need of national cooperation with respect to intelligent
land use. The second is the relation of economic forces to soil destruction,
and the place of these forces among the factors to be met in solving conserva-
tion problems.

Extended Acreage and a Restricted Market

In common with many of our other present-day agricultural problems, our
soils problem was greatly accentuated by conditions growing out of the World War.
Agricultural nerves, which had been strained to the utmost to produce more--
more wheat, more corn, more meat--failed to relax. Under the pressure of a

Government-directed stimulation and the war price stimulus, an area similar in size to the entire State of Illinois had been added from 1910 to 1920 to the acreage of farm land harvested in the United States.

Acceleration in the exploitation of agricultural resources in the North Central Region can be traced through Federal Census data. This Region, which includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, increased its amount of land in farms by more than 15 million acres from 1910 to 1920. This is the equivalent of nearly 94,000 farms of 160 acres each.

Much of the land which came under the plow at that time lay in the Great Plains portions of Western Nebraska and South Dakota. Notable expansion also was made in the humid areas of the Region. Large acreages were plowed that under ordinary circumstances would not produce sufficient yields to cover farmers' production costs. Some of the distressed drainage projects in the North Central States may be cited as monuments to enterprises developed during the promotional period.

The increase of land in farms in these 10 States accounted for an expansion of nearly 10 million acres in the amount of crop land harvested. The acreage of cultivated crops showed an almost identical increase. Thus by the pressure of an apparently inexhaustible market abroad, the germ of the post-war agricultural dilemma was sown and the deterioration of our better lands was hastened.

A logical development following the war would have been a recession in the cultivated land area in line with the recession in the foreign demand for agricultural products. This development, however, did not occur either nationally or regionally, despite the effect of increasing trade restrictions abroad and the piling up of excessive surplus stocks at home. Low farm prices and destructive farming practices did force the abandonment of a substantial acreage of farm

land in some areas of the Region during the Twenties. Nevertheless, the North Central Region as a whole increased its acreage of cultivated crops in this period by nearly 2 million acres.

Soil Depletion in the Corn Belt

Though fertility and erosion losses were aggravated by the war developments, soil depletion has been characteristic of most crop land in this Region ever since the advent of Corn Belt agriculture.

Slightly more than two-fifths of the national acreage of cultivated or so-called "problem" crops are located in these 10 States. The cultivated crops present a two-fold problem, first from the standpoint of the market and second from the standpoint of the soil. When excessive quantities of these crops are grown for a restricted market, prices inevitably fall. In the past, the struggle to maintain farm income at low prices has always driven farmers to maintain or expand their volume. In such a situation the land is depleted of its plant food nutrients at an increasing rate.

Over much of the Corn Belt, heavy overcropping is the major soils problem. This is especially true, according to a report of the National Resources Board, "on the erosive land along the eastern edge of the sandhills, the dissected plains of southern Nebraska, and the hilly areas of southern Iowa, northern Missouri and Western Illinois." It has been estimated that in this area alone, the serious effects of overcropping cover about 36 million acres of farm land including 20 million acres of crop land.

Likewise in other areas, the soils have become harder to work, the available plant food content has declined, and the productive capacity of the land has been progressively lowered.

The historic Morrow plots here at the University of Illinois demonstrate what is happening to the soils of many Illinois farms. A comparatively level

plot in continuous corn and oats for 23 years had lost 4 tons of humus per acre. This decrease in plant food content was accompanied by dwindling crop yields. Another plot on which corn, oats and clover were rotated and proper fertilizers were applied contained 14 tons more of organic matter per acre than did the corn-and-oats plot.

Studies made in Ohio reveal that during the past 60 years when crop yields might have been expected to increase because of the adoption of improved varieties of crops, better seed, and insect and disease-control methods, these practices merely balanced the downward trend in the average ability of Ohio soils to produce. Similar studies at Iowa State College show that under present cultural practices Iowa cannot effectively maintain fertility and control erosion; in order to do so, a considerable reduction must be made in corn acreage. These studies indicate conclusively that changes in cropping practices are necessary to offset the gradual depletion in soil fertility on the average Corn Belt farm.

On rolling lands, the problem of soil washing is graphically displayed, oftentimes after only one large rainfall. Soils tests at the University of Missouri show that on a 4 percent slope, land planted to a rotation of corn, wheat and clover lost only about one-seventh as much soil as land cropped continuously to corn, and that land kept in bluegrass lost only one-sixtieth as much soil as that in continuous corn.

These experiments by State and Federal agencies have proved the value of such soil-conserving and soil-building practices as proper rotations, a greater use of legumes and grasses, the use of cover and green manure crops, the application of mineral supplements and terracing.

For a good many years, conscientious educational efforts have been directed toward persuading individual farmers to practice soil conservation in line with the accumulated results of these experiments. The response among such

farmers as could afford it has been encouraging. In recent years, however, only about 25 percent of our Corn Belt crop land has been devoted to legumes and grasses. This is a ratio of three to one, three acres of soil-depleting crops to one acre of soil-conserving crops. Insofar as a ratio of about two to one for the entire Region is generally considered as necessary to prevent serious soil depletion and soil erosion, it may be said that farmers, in general, have continued to practice an exploitative type of farming.

Need of National Cooperation

I think that Corn Belt farmers generally know how to treat their land better than they have treated it in the past. But, in order to survive economic forces over which they as individuals have no control, a large percentage of them have been forced to take a short-time interest in the land.

During the Twenties and early Thirties, as farmers continued to "mine" their soil, they were virtually selling off the fertility of their land, piecemeal, along with the crops. Burdened with a serious disparity between agricultural and non-agricultural prices, troubled with declining farm land values, and hard pressed by debts, cash rentals and other fixed obligations, they are unable to adopt those soil-conserving and improving practices which do not bring an immediate cash return.

Improved economic conditions alone, however, cannot be relied upon to effectuate careful land use. Man is comparatively short-lived. He looks upon the land, its soil and the plant food elements in the soil from a relatively short-time point of view. When free lands were still available he solved his soils problems by moving to virgin grasslands. On the land left behind without a protective cover of grass or trees, soil erosion and soil depletion were allowed to go their way unrestrained. Many of this farmer's descendants are short-lease tenants who probably are not compensated for improvements in soil fertility. Still

others with an urge to move to other farms, may not have a long-time interest in the soil and its productivity.

Unless we are to surrender ourselves utterly to unbridled competition and all its consequences, our country may reasonably aspire to maintain its agricultural lands in such condition that the food supply of future generations will not be further jeopardized by soil deterioration and the loss of soil itself. It will suffice to say that we have only to take our cue from older Nations. The fate that has befallen vast land areas in the Orient shows America the ultimate penalties of land abuse.

From the standpoint of both private and general interest, the conservation of national soil resources necessitates national cooperation and action.

Legislation for Agricultural Conservation

It was not until 1933 that the Federal Government, whose chief interest in agriculture from 1862 to 1918 had been to stimulate production, began to face the realities of the post-war situation and of changing social and technological conditions.

Under the 1934 and 1935 commodity adjustment programs, soil conservation was an incidental though a valuable benefit. It has been conservatively estimated from analyses made in Minnesota and Illinois that from two-thirds to three-fourths of the average of 11 million acres diverted from corn, wheat, cotton and tobacco in the North Central Region were planted to legumes and grasses. Though the diversion was of a more or less temporary nature, the programs paved the way for nationwide cooperation to conserve the soil.

With the passage of the Soil Conservation Act in April, 1935, the importance of soils problems gained greater national recognition. The purpose of this Act was to protect land resources against erosion. It provided for a general program of research and demonstration to be conducted by the Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with State experiment stations and with farmers

themselves. Under this program, studies were made into the character and extent of soil losses, and soil erosion experiment stations were set up to work out new crops, rotations and mechanical devices, and to improve upon old methods of slowing up erosion. In addition, project demonstration areas have been established to show farmers what erosion control measures and practices are needed, why they are needed, and what results may be anticipated from their adoption. Thirty demonstration areas, each covering from 6,000 to 35,000 acres, are located in this Region.

On February 29, 1936, as a consequence of the Hoosac Mills decision, the Soil Conservation Act was amended and broadened. It became the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act. By its recognition that the farmer's opportunity to practice soil conservation is measured by his financial ability to do so, this Act makes available a new approach to the problem, an approach which reaches the bulk of the Nation's farm land. Hence, a fundamental change is made possible, farm by farm, from an exploitative to a conservative type of farming.

In 1936, financial aid will go to farmers in the form of direct Federal grants. The farmer who cooperates in the program is under no contractual obligations. If he so desires, he simply plans his farming operations in line with the definite soil conservation standards which have been worked out with producers, with soils specialists, and with state agricultural leaders who are in direct contact with immediate problems in the various type-of-farming areas. If he applies for a soil conservation grant, performance on his farm will be checked later in the year, first to determine the extent to which he has met the standards, and second to determine the amount of grant which he is eligible to receive.

Approximately \$470,000,000 is available this year for the Federal grants and for the administration of the program locally and nationally. The national goal is to have 130 million acres of crop land devoted to soil-conserving crops

in the United States as compared with the 1930 level of 100 million acres.

Farmer Cooperative Administration

The program this year is essentially a Federal one, but for administrative purposes, the country has been divided into five regions--the Northeast Region, the East Central Region, the Southern Region, the Western Region, and the North Central Region. Each region has more or less its own individual problems arising largely from differences in soils, climate, and the kind of crops produced.

The organization for conducting the 1936 program in the North Central Region exemplifies the principle of cooperation among farmers in meeting their own problems--the same principle that was adhered to with success under the former adjustment programs. The administrative set-up in Illinois may be cited as fairly typical of that found in the other nine States.

The State Agricultural Conservation Committee, the coordinating body between the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the local organizations, is in charge of all administrative phases of the program in the State. This committee is composed of five members, four of whom are farmers appointed from more or less distinct type-of-farming areas in the State. The chairman is from the livestock-dairy and specialty crop area in northern Illinois; one member is located in the central Illinois general cash corn and small grain district; the other two farmer members are from the general farming areas farther south. The fifth member of the State Committee is a State Extension soils specialist representing the Illinois Agricultural Extension Service, which is in charge of the educational phases of the program.

The essential duties of the State Committee are of a supervisory and advisory nature. Final approval of soil-depleting bases rests with this group; they are charged with the acquisition and disposition of local and State office supplies, the supervision of checking the performance made by cooperating

farmers, the administrative examination of applications for grants and the review of all county administrative expenditures and program disbursements. In brief, the relative cost, operation and effectiveness of the program in Illinois, is dependent upon them.

The organization within the counties is similar to that which proved effective under the 1934 and 1935 corn-hog and wheat adjustment programs. Each of the 102 counties in Illinois has its own county and community committeemen, all of whom are farmers. These men constitute the backbone of the field force. The three to six committeemen in each township or other similarly defined area, depending upon its size, were elected by their neighbors at community or township meetings which were held soon after the program got under way early in April. Much of their work for this year is now complete. They have assisted program participants in executing work sheets and in planning their farming operations in line with soil conservation standards. Later in the year they will determine the extent to which cooperating farmers have met the standards of performance on their respective farming units.

The chairmen of the community committees in a county comprise the board of directors of the County Agricultural Conservation Association, the membership of which consists of all participating farmers in the county.

At county association meetings held during the latter part of April, a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer, as well as a county committee, were elected. The county committee includes the president and vice president of the board and one other member. It is responsible to the State Committee for the administration of the program in the county. It must supervise and coordinate the work of the various community committeemen, review all program forms and documents filed in the county, and make final recommendations for adjusted soil-depleting bases so the sum of all individual bases within the county will fall within the county limits. The county committee also holds hearings, con-

ducts investigations, and makes recommendations to the State Committee and the Secretary of Agriculture concerning many phases of the program as it applies to the county.

The educational work involved in the explanation of the program and its application on Illinois farms is under the direction of the Illinois Agricultural Extension Service. This work is indispensable. Since late March, county and State Extension supervisors have devoted a major share of their time to holding district, county and community meetings to describe the program and explain to committeemen the execution of forms and the handling of other features. The Extension representative on the State Committee, who is acquainted with all executive and administrative phases, coordinates the activities of the Extension Service and the Committee. Other members of the Extension staff also have given valuable assistance in increasing the effectiveness of the program in this State. Likewise in other States, the cooperative attitude of the personnel of the State Extension services and State experiment stations has contributed materially to the farmers' widespread interest and understanding of the program.

You may readily see how largely the administrative responsibility rests with farmers themselves. Local committeemen have undertaken a huge task. They receive a moderate per diem salary, but in most instances this does not recompense them for all their personal service and sacrifices.

Provisions of the 1936 Program in the North Central Region

The starting point in determining an individual farmer's contribution to the national soil conservation goal is his soil-depleting base. In order to establish this base, and to determine a farmer's qualification for a grant, crop land ^{1/} uses are divided into two major classifications, soil-depleting and soil-

^{1/} By "crop land" is meant all farm land which is tillable and from which at least one crop other than wild hay was harvested between January 1, 1930 and January 1, 1936, and all other farm land which is devoted to orchards or vineyards which had not reached bearing age on January 1, 1936.

conserving, depending upon the nature of the crop grown on the land.

Land Classified According to Crop Grown

The use of land for the production of certain crops that deplete the soil and expose it to the erosive effects of wind and water is considered a soil-depleting use for the year in which the crop is normally harvested. I shall not name all of these soil-depleting crops. In general, however, they include corn; small grains harvested for grain or hay or seeded alone and pastured; annual grasses pastured or harvested for grain or hay; soybeans, cowpeas, field beans, and field peas harvested for grain or hay; the sorghums; potatoes; commercial truck and vegetable crops; sugar beets; tobacco; cotton; and the like.

The use of crop land for the production of practically any of the legumes and perennial grasses is considered as soil conserving. If a soil-depleting crop is harvested off the land during the same year, however, the land is given a soil-depleting classification. Another qualification is that when soil-conserving crops are grown with a nurse crop, the nurse crop must be clipped green or pastured sufficiently to prevent grain formation. Unless otherwise provided, a good stand of the soil-conserving crops will constitute proof of performance.

Land in soybeans, field beans, cowpeas, or field peas, is soil-conserving only if these crops are turned under as green manure. Likewise land in small grain crops is considered as soil-conserving this year if the crops, whether pastured or not, were turned under as green manure by June 15 and will be followed by a soil-conserving crop seeded before September 1 without a nurse crop. Other crop land that may be classed as soil-conserving this year includes land in orchards and vineyards interplanted with winter cover crops handled in the prescribed manner, acreages summer fallowed if cultivated before June 15 and followed by a soil-conserving crop seeded before September 1 without a nurse crop, and acreages used in the prescribed manner for the control of such perennial noxious weeds as may be designated by the State Committee.

Since the program was first announced, changes and additions have been made in the land classification to take into account certain conditions peculiar to the dry land areas of Nebraska and South Dakota and to the cotton counties of southeastern Missouri. Other amendments have been made to enable fruit growers and truck crop farmers to cooperate to a greater extent in the program.

Base Established from Work Sheet Data

With the aid of the land classification and of a specially prepared form, called a work sheet, a soil-depleting base is established for the farm of each farm owner or operator who plans to cooperate. In general, the contents of the work sheet include an appraised normal yield of the crop land on the farm, the 1935 crop acreage data, and other land-use information from which the base is determined.

On farms where the so-called "special" crops -- cotton, tobacco, sugar beets, and flax -- are produced, three types of soil-depleting bases are established. They are (1) a total soil-depleting base including the acreage of all soil-depleting crops grown on the farm, (2) a special soil-depleting base for each of the special crops, and (3) a general soil-depleting base including all soil-depleting crops other than cotton, tobacco, sugar beets, and flax.

Insofar as these special crops are produced on the minority of Corn Belt farms, and as the program procedure and administrative provisions are slightly different for these farms, I shall limit this discussion to the provisions which affect the majority of cooperators in the Corn Belt region. Provisions pertaining to all cooperators may be found in North Central Region Bulletins No. 1 revised and Nos. 1A and 1B, issued April 15, May 2 and May 29, respectively.

The general soil-depleting base is intended to represent a normal acreage of the general soil-depleting crops on the farm according to customary farming practice in the community. The total acres on the farm devoted to the

production of general soil-depleting crops last year is the starting point for establishing the base. This acreage figure is then modified to the extent that it is necessary in order to arrive at a base that can be justified as the normal acreage of such crops on the farm and to provide equity among individual farms within the county and among counties.

The modifications may consist of four types of adjustment as determined by local committeemen from the work sheet data. One adjustment is made to include in the 1935 soil-depleting acreage any adjusted or contracted acres under 1935 commodity contracts from which no soil-depleting crops were harvested in 1935. Another is made if, because of unusual weather conditions, the producer's farming operations in 1935 were not representative of his normal practice. This adjustment may be either upward or downward.

The third adjustment, which also may be either upward or downward, is made on farms where the 1935 acreage of soil-depleting crops is abnormally high or abnormally low in comparison with the soil-depleting acreage on farms in the community that are similar with respect to size, type of soil, topography, production facilities, and farming practices.

A fourth modification in individual bases becomes necessary if it is found, after preliminary adjustments for the above-mentioned factors, that the ratio of the aggregate of the tentative soil-depleting base acreage to total farm land covered by work sheets exceeds the county limit.

The county limit is the ratio of the soil-depleting crop acreage of all farm land in the county to the total acreage of such farm land. This limit has been derived for each county by adjusting 1929 census data in accordance with changes in the percentage of farm land in soil-depleting crops from 1929 to 1932 and 1933 as shown by assessor's reports and other available data. The

two base years, 1932-1933, were selected as the period to be used in establishing the county limits since this period represents for the Region as a whole the most normal period for the production of soil-depleting crops in recent years. As the totals used in computing this ratio included the acreage of crop failure as well as the harvested acreage, localized droughts during these base years have no material effect on the county limits.

When the total of all bases in a county has been brought within the county ratio limit, individual farmers will be notified of their preliminary bases. These bases, however, are not necessarily final. If a farmer is convinced that his preliminary base is not fair or representative of his normal farming practice, he has the opportunity to appeal to the county committee, setting forth the reasons why he believes his base is inequitable. When his appeal has been heard, he will be notified of the committee's action. If the appellant is still dissatisfied, he has the further opportunity of appealing to the State Committee for final action.

This appeal procedure was considered advisable and worthwhile from two standpoints. In the first place, broad latitude of authority has been given to county committees to establish bases by taking into account farming practices, topography of the land, production facilities and similar facts other than historical records. With such a large task to accomplish in a limited time, it is logical to expect that some unintentional errors will be made by committeemen. In the second place, the opportunity to appeal is consistent with the spirit of the democratic process which underlies the entire farm program.

It is hoped that by getting a complete coverage of farm land by work sheets this year, and by taking every reasonable precaution to have bases established in an equitable manner, the bases will be satisfactory not only for

use in 1936 but also for subsequent programs.

After the county committee has met the county limit and acted on all appeals, the action taken on the appeals and the listing sheets containing the work sheet data are submitted to the State Committee. Here the county figures are carefully reviewed for errors. If errors are found, necessary adjustments are made and the State Committee sends the final base figures to the county committee. If adjustments by the State Committee cause changes in individual bases of more than one percent, each producer whose base has been changed to this extent will be notified of his final base.

The county committee then is instructed to post in or near the county office a complete list of the farmers for whom work sheets were executed, and showing for each farm the total acreage of farm land, the final soil-depleting base, and the index of productivity for each farm.

It is believed that the appeals procedure, together with the requirements that the essential data be posted, will assure impartial work on the part of local committees and avoid many suspicions that impartial work was not done. A farmer who mistrusts the local committee or believes that a committeeman has "dealt himself an unusually good hand" may have his curiosity satisfied by consulting the posted figures.

Performance Checked and Application Made for Grant

After a farmer has received notification of his base and the cropping season has been sufficiently advanced, he will have the opportunity of requesting an inspection of his farm. The participant's extent of performance will then be checked and his eligibility for a grant will be established by the community committee. If the cooperator owns or operates more than one farm in the county, and if he applies for a grant on all of them, his eligibility for a grant and the amount of his grant will be determined on all such farms in the county in much the same manner as if they were but one farm.

The farmer's next step is to make a formal application for a soil conservation grant. This application must indicate that a work sheet has been executed for each farm he owns or operates in the county and that a positive contribution to soil conservation has been made on his farm or farms in accordance with standards established for 1936.

A Federal grant will be made direct to the cooperator as soon as possible after actual evidence of performance has been certified by the local committee and approved by the State Committee.

Grants May Consist of Two Payments

The farmer who meets the prescribed standards of performance may qualify for either or both of two classes of payments. And for the reason that there are some variations, I want to call your attention again to the fact that I am discussing the program only as it will affect the majority of farmers in the North Central Region.

The two payments are the Class I or soil-conserving payment, and the Class II or soil-building payment.

The Class I payment will be made to farmers who divert a portion of their soil-depleting base acreage to soil-conserving crops or uses. In making this diversion, Corn Belt farmers will be shifting some of their land out of crops

that deplete the soil and into crops or uses which conserve the soil and add to its fertility. They will receive this payment on the diversion of any number of acres up to 15 percent of their respective bases.

The Class I payment will be made on a per-acre basis, and will average approximately \$10 an acre for the entire Nation. It will vary among counties and among individual farms according to the relative productivity of the crop land. The national average of \$10 an acre was based upon an estimate of available funds and an estimate of approximately 80 percent participation by farmers. If participation in the Region exceeds the estimate, it may be necessary to reduce the payment rates pro rata. Provision has been made whereby the rates may be similarly increased pro rata if participation is less than the estimate. In no case however will the rates be increased or decreased more than 10 percent.

The productivity of an individual farm will be determined from the appraised normal yield of the principal crop grown on the farm, which on most Corn Belt farms is corn. The average of all individual appraisals in the county must equal the normal yield of the principal crop in the county. Each farmer's appraised yield will be compared with the county average to determine the productivity index for the farm. The Class I payment rate for the farm then will be obtained by multiplying the farm's productivity index by the average per-acre payment for the county.

Farmers who take additional steps to build up the productive capacity of their farms also may qualify for the Class II or soil-building payment.

In making this payment, the Federal Government is sharing with farmers from 60 to 75 percent of the direct outlay costs of adopting certain approved soil-building practices.

The payment thus will enable farmers who have been following good farming practices and who have a large percentage of their respective farms in soil-conserving crops to participate in the program by complementing or further improving the practices which they now follow.

The participating farmer may earn the Class II payment at different rates per acre depending upon the kind and normal cost of the approved practice which he adopts on his farm. The original rates and practices, as advised by the State agricultural colleges and recommended by the respective State Committees were announced in early April. During the succeeding month, additional practices were added to the approved list largely to enable farmers in particular type-of-farming areas to cooperate to a greater extent in the program.

The principal soil-building practices that apply uniformly throughout the Region are (1) new seedings of legumes, (2) new seedings of perennial grasses, (3) soybeans, cowpeas and Canadiah field peas turned under as green manure, and (4) applications of limestone, phosphates and potash. Payments will be made for terracing and for some of the other practices only in areas designated by the State Committee. In the dry land areas of Nebraska and South Dakota, farmers may qualify for small per-acre payments if they plant rye as a nurse crop for establishing pasture grasses or if they strip fallow in the prescribed manner in order to prevent wind erosion.

I should mention here that there is a top limit on the total amount of Class II payment that a cooperating farmer may receive. This limit is called his soil-building allowance. In general, it is the same number of dollars as there are acres of soil-conserving crops on crop land on his farm in 1936. Therefore, the larger the acreage of soil-conserving crops on crop land, the larger will be the soil-building allowance. The farmer may earn all or part of his allowance, depending upon the amount for which he would qualify by adopting the soil-building practices recommended and approved for his locality and State.

All soil-building practices are required to be conducted in accordance with sound farming practices, using such methods and such kinds and quantities of seeds, trees and other materials as conform to good farming practice.

Deductions May be Made

Applicants for soil conservation grants must meet the prescribed standards of performance before they can obtain all payments that otherwise would be made to them. Deductions will be made from payments if these standards are not fulfilled.

One deduction will be made if a farmer fails to have in 1936 the minimum acreage of soil-conserving crops required for full payment. Another deduction will be made if the acreage of soil-depleting crops on the farm in 1936 is larger than the soil-depleting base. If the total amount of deductions is greater than the total grant that otherwise would be made, no penalty will be assessed; but the producer, of course, will be declared ineligible to receive a grant.

An over-all provision makes it possible for the Secretary to withhold all or any part of any payment which otherwise would be made to a farmer if the farmer adopts any rotation, cropping, or other practices which tend to defeat the purposes of the 1936 program.

A Broad, Flexible Program

We have endeavored to make the 1936 Agricultural Conservation Program for this Region sufficiently broad and elastic to enable every farm owner and operator who is interested in making a greater effort to conserve the soil on his farm to participate in the nationwide program.

The provisions of the program which I have outlined indicate its wide flexibility and its adaptability to extremely varied farming practices.

Though the Region is perhaps more homogeneous than any of the other four regions, there is by no means complete uniformity. There are a number of clearly defined subregions, which include the dry lands of western Nebraska and South Dakota; the intensive feed grain and livestock feeding areas extending through eastern Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio; the cash grain areas of northwestern Iowa, southeastern Nebraska and east central Illinois; southern Iowa

and northern Missouri where the emphasis on livestock production shifts from feeding to a greater use of pasture; and the Lake States Dairy area. In addition, smaller areas are devoted largely to truck crops, potatoes, cotton, tobacco, sugar beets, and the like.

Though the program, as originally announced, did not take cognizance of some of these regional differences and interrelationships, additions and modifications of program provisions were rapidly developed to enable farmers in all areas to cooperate by following sound soil-conserving practices.

For example, in 64 counties of western Nebraska and 52 counties of western South Dakota, where the combination of light rainfall and much light sandy soil has brought problems peculiar to this area, farmers are being encouraged to return to native grasses such land that never should have been plowed in the first place. Insofar as ordinary legumes are not adapted to the area, inducements are being offered for the use of rye, when not pastured or harvested for grain or hay, as a nurse crop to foster the growth of volunteer or seeded perennial native grasses.

Similar steps have been taken to adapt the program to southeastern Missouri where the climate, soils, and type of farming are more typical of the Southern Region. Likewise, in other type-of-farming areas, farmers are being encouraged to adopt the soil-conserving and soil-building practices which are best adapted to the area.

All farmers--dairymen, livestock producers, fruit and vegetable growers, as well as those engaged in general farming practices--may employ the provisions of the program to better their farms and thereby to improve the soil wealth of the entire Nation.

Progress to Date

The number of work sheets that have been executed is indicative of the progress that has been made in the North Central Region to date.

Unofficial reports from the various States as of June 6 reveal that approximately 1,884,000 work sheets have been executed in this Region alone. The number by States is as follows: Illinois, 217,000; Indiana, 239,500; Iowa, 235,000; Michigan, 158,000; Minnesota, 167,500; Missouri, 252,500; Nebraska, 175,000; Ohio, 186,000; South Dakota, 93,500; and Wisconsin, 160,000. A total of about 300,000 more is expected within a short time.

These reports, however, do not necessarily indicate the degree of participation. Though a work sheet is a prerequisite to eligibility for a grant, it does not obligate a farmer to perform wholly or in part with the program standards. As one of the provisions of the program requires that a work sheet be filled out for each separately-owned or separately-operated tract of land in the farming unit, the execution of two work sheets may be required to cover one farm. For example, if an owner-operator rents a small tract from his neighbor on a share basis, and operates it as a part of his farming unit, two work sheets will be necessary. In the majority of the 898 counties, all farms will be covered by work sheets.

Since it will be impossible in any community to check the extent of performance on individual farms until after the last planting date for crops to be harvested in 1936, it is impossible at this time to estimate with any degree of accuracy what the aggregate performance in the Region will be this year. With 80 percent participation and a 70 to 80 percent diversion on the part of individual farmers, the shift from soil-depleting to soil-conserving crops in 1936 would amount to about 10 percent of the aggregate general base of 117 million acres. This diversion would mean an increase in soil-conserving crops of about 11 million acres above the 1930 level.

Whether a diversion approaching this figure may be anticipated, we do not know. The fact that the planting season in some states was well advanced before the program got under way in April, and that farmers were not notified of their

bases until late May and June, has made it impossible for a considerable number of producers to participate to the fullest possible extent, if at all. However, this situation was unavoidable. The new farm act was not enacted until February 29. After that time it was essential to confer with producers on the provisions of the program and to develop the program administratively. The next step necessitated getting the machinery of organization into operation, familiarizing committeemen with program provisions, and instructing them relative to execution of forms and to other phases of local administration.

For maximum participation and effectiveness, farmers should have been well acquainted with the program provisions by the time the act was passed by Congress. Despite the time factor, however, every effort has been made in the field to do effective work, and to do it in such a creditable manner that repetition next year will be held to a minimum.

Looking Ahead

Most of the differences between the 1936 Agricultural Conservation Program and the 1934 and 1935 commodity adjustment programs represent a realization of trends the Agricultural Adjustment Administration was endeavoring to get under way before the Supreme Court decision on January 6.

As to purpose, the primary objective of the commodity programs was production control with soil conservation as an incidental; the reverse is true this year. As to bases, broad latitude of authority is given committeemen, particularly county committeemen, to establish bases upon an appraisal of physical factors rather than upon strict adherence to historical records which was an inherent weakness of the old programs. Participation in 1936 is unquestionably of a purely voluntary nature; conditional grants are being offered, with no contractual obligations. Since the need for financial aid on the farm is not so immediate as in 1934 and 1935, and because of the inability to determine performance until at least late summer, payments are being made in only one installment which makes for economy of operation.

Particular emphasis was placed in 1936 upon decentralization, first from the standpoint of more responsibility and authority to the States, counties, and communities, and second from the standpoint of operating machinery. Steps already have been taken to audit certificates of grants and to distribute grants from the State headquarters rather than from Washington. Having adopted these changes, administrative costs should be lower, and there should be a minimum of disruption and confusion when the program changes from a Federal to a State basis. In any decentralization, however, the necessity of coordination from a national point of view, of fitting local and State activities into the national picture, must always be borne in mind. As in 1936, the program for 1937 will be planned with this end in view.

Planning for 1937 is already under way. The Act authorizes an annual appropriation of \$500,000,000. Efforts are being made at this time to coordinate the results of experimental and demonstrational activities conducted by the State agricultural experiment stations and the Soil Conservation Service, and to appraise the data obtained in the regional adjustment, State, and county planning projects, in order to determine policies to be applied in the 1937 program.

The operation of the present program during the next six months will shed considerable light on some of the problems we now face. For example, we will want to determine whether the county limits and the soil-depleting bases established within the county limits should be adjusted in some areas in order to be equitable and in conformity with good farming practice. In counties where the county limits prove to be satisfactory in 1936 and committeemen do a good job of establishing equitable bases, the administration of the 1937 program should be simple and entail but little expense.

Another pertinent question is whether there should be a breakdown in the general soil-depleting base so as to establish one base for corn and other row crops and another base for broadcast or drilled soil-depleting crops. Perhaps

differential rates of payment should be made between the two classes because of the difference in the extent of depletion involved and in the amount of sacrifice involved in shifting from soil-depleting to soil-conserving crops. When the 1936 program was being developed, the reaction of producers generally was that all general soil-depleting crops should be in one base largely because of the need for simplicity in view of the limited time for getting the program under way and because of the need for maximum flexibility in 1936. It also will be necessary to determine what adjustments in rates of payments should be made, if any.

In solving these and other problems and in developing general provisions for the 1937 program, the North Central Division will be guided by the advice of county and State committeemen and by recommendations from the State colleges.

In looking further ahead, farmers and agricultural leaders in the North Central Region must realize their responsibility in carrying out a long-time agricultural conservation program. Each year, these 10 States produce approximately 87 percent of the Nation's commercial supply of hogs, from 50 to 55 percent of its beef, from 30 to 40 percent of its wheat, and approximately 65 percent of its feed grains, including corn, oats, barley, and grain sorghums. Largely because of these facts, the vast valley of the Mississippi has become known as the Nation's "food basket".

From the standpoint of the soil itself, data compiled by the National Resources Board in 1934 reveal that 86.3 percent of the "Grade One" land in the United States--land described as "excellent for the staple crops climatically adapted to the region in which it lies"--is located in the North Central Region. The conservation of this precious asset is fundamental and vital.

Regional Relationships

In this paper, I have presented only the problems and the program in the North Central Region--the Region with which I am most familiar. In conclusion, however, I want to point out one thing that becomes increasingly more clear to

those of us who work on these problems; that is the intimate and important way in which the problems of this Region are interrelated with those of other Regions.

We have seen that the conservation of soil and the maintenance of farm income are so closely related that the attainment of one is practically impossible without the achievement of the other.

The importance of the economic factor in the exploitation of agricultural resources is in itself a demonstration of the general nature of the soil conservation problem. Most farmers will not sell off their capital of soil and its fertility if they can afford to save it as a source of continuous income.

Price changes, determined by economic factors which are effective over the entire country, do not recognize State lines. The West knows how distress among farmers in the East or in the South communicates itself to this Region through competition with ~~our~~ products, and by other methods. Likewise, out here, we know that our farmers feel the favorable effects of the improvement in prices of products grown on farms in other Regions.

I believe that our farmers, in their work on the adjustment programs in 1934 and 1935 and on the agricultural conservation program this year, are convinced that the most pressing problems of conserving the soil and of maintaining farm income are not local but are national in scope. I further believe that a general recognition of this fact by our non-farm population not only will enable agriculture to retain the recovery it has made thus far, but also will pave the way to still greater progress in the future.

